

IGFF Response to Report of Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools.

IGFF thanks and acknowledges the courage and bravery of Survivors whose testimony was provided to the Inquiry and will help drive necessary change. We also acknowledge the work of the Inquiry team members who undertook this complex work with great resolve and an awareness of the deep-seated trauma held in these impacted communities. In recognising the hard work and tireless advocacy of many, IGFF also recognises those who were unable to participate in this Inquiry and offers them our support. IGFF appreciates that the voices of many who have been impacted by abuse in similar school settings voices were not heard through this process and the hurt associated with this.

Whilst the Inquiry's findings offer a starting point for accountability, many of the issues examined in this Inquiry offer a microcosm example, emblematic of much deeper, systematic issues that require a much more profound accounting for historic and contemporaneous harms within Victoria's educational system. It would be negligent to ignore the widespread and devastating harm that occurred beyond the restricted parameters of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, and it is incumbent upon the Government as they navigate this complex terrain of healing and accountability to extend the opportunity to engage in a formal process to all Survivors'. This Report and its recommendations offer a much broader opportunity to recommit to a future where every Survivors' story is recognised, every voice heard, and justice becomes a tangible reality rather than a distant promise.

IGFF calls upon the Victorian Government to articulate concrete steps towards achieving all these recommendations and adequately funding a specialist sexual assault support service for all those impacted by institutional abuse.

Clare Leaney
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IGFF offers the following reply to The Board of Inquiry's recommendations:

Recommendation 1 – A statewide public apology

IGFF supports the Inquiry's recommendation that there be a public apology issued by the Government to those who endured unspeakable trauma within the scope of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. We agree that this is an important step towards rectifying past wrongs and essential as a formal recognition of harms done. However, a statewide apology will be largely meaningless for all those whose abuse occurred outside of the Inquiry's extremely narrow Terms of Reference and for those who have yet to formally have their voices and experiences recognised within Victoria. It is imperative that all Survivors, regardless of circumstance, have their voices heard and their experiences validated within a framework of justice.

IGFF recommends that as part of this apology to the Beaumaris community:

- There be recognition that harm has occurred elsewhere and a commitment by Government to a further apology once all Survivors have had the opportunity to engage with a formal process.
- At a minimum the Victorian Government should immediately outline further commitments and a roadmap of how they plan to implement Recommendation 9.1 from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse* (https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf) and funding for dedicated services for all those impacted by institutional abuse.

Recommendation 2 – A new memorial and a consistent process

IGFF unreservedly supports this recommendation, recognising that memorials offer a unique opportunity for healing, commemoration, and collaboration amongst a diverse cohort of stakeholders. Given our extensive experience and detailed best-practice model for the delivery of Memorials, IGFF looks forward to coordinating this project in keeping with the project outline provided to the Inquiry.

IGFF recommends that:

- This should not be government led but rather coordinated independently to best ensure the Survivor community's participation.
- Deliberation and consultation be undertaken to provide a response in situations where the relevant school/entity is now defunct.

Recommendation 3 – A statewide truth-telling and accountability process

IGFF provided both written and verbal requests to the Inquiry and more broadly in Parliament calling for the Inquiry's existing narrow scope be broadened to encompass everyone who has been impacted by abuse within Victoria's public education system. We highlighted on numerous occasions the risks posed by further delays and the ongoing problematic division occurring, that prioritised some experiences of abuse over others. We remain disappointed that this was not given greater consideration and that further work will now have to be undertaken by Survivors to build another process to respond to the harm they have experienced.

IGFF recommends that any truth-telling and accountability process be:

- Be resourced by support services with extensive experience in responding to disclosures of institutional sexual assault and not provided by internal Government departments. This will help minimise any actual and/or perceived conflicts of interest and allow for a clear delineation between support services and Government accountability.
- The eligibility for this process should be expanded to include secondary Survivors (immediate family: parents, siblings, spouses, etc.) and whistle-blowers.
- Further consideration and planning should be undertaken to respond to contemporaneous allegations of sexual abuse, ensuring that Survivors of abuse from 1990 and beyond are afforded the same opportunities for truth-telling and accountability.

IGFF seeks clarity around the following matters:

- How will this process to implement its mandate for accountability?
- Is there any potential for criminal findings and how will this be managed?
- What options do Survivors have regarding de-identification and privacy?
- How will this process ensure that it cannot be used against Survivors in civil litigation processes?
- How will this process ensure compliance with Mandatory reporting obligations and what support and information will be made available to people who might be impacted?

Recommendation 4 – A restorative engagement program

IGFF is wholly supportive of this recommendation. We acknowledge the further options for engagement that this offers to a variety of Survivor's who may otherwise not have access to appropriate acknowledgement and apology. IGFF looks forward to further consultation on the development and implementation of this program.

IGFF seeks further information about:

- What Support Services will be available to Survivors who choose this option?
- What elements of this will be available to Secondary Survivors and Whistleblowers?

Recommendation 5 – Improving information access

IGFF is broadly supportive of this recommendation and looks forward to working further with the Department of Education, providing our specialist training to ensure that all interactions provide safety and trauma-awareness for Survivors'.

Recommendation 6 – A new online hub and telephone line providing information and assistance for adult victim-survivors

IGFF is broadly supportive of this recommendation, however, do not believe that this should be administered by the Department of Education.

In order to facilitate the greatest level of participation by the Survivor community and further minimise actual or perceived conflicts of interest this should be administered by an independent service and funded by the Department of Education. It is entirely possible that any attempt to provide this as an internal departmental function will be viewed with suspicion and an attempt to filter information to the advantage of the responsible institution. IGFF would further recommend that this recommendation be merged with Recommendation 7 and form a central part of the Victorian Government's implementation of Recommendation 9.1.

Recommendation 7 – Coordination, Navigation and Advocacy

IGFF is broadly supportive of this recommendation having long lobbied for sufficient funding to help Survivors' of institutional abuse navigate complex justice pathways and changeable health care systems in which access is challenged both by financial means and location. Having provided this crucial casework navigation service for almost three decades, we remain chronically underfunded, with the demand for our service far exceeding our capacity. As noted above, we strongly recommend this not be a function of the Government itself. Instead, it should be an independent service funded by the Government and accessible to all Victorian's who experienced institutional abuse as consistent with Recommendation 9.1 of the Royal Commission.

Recommendation 8 - A targeted program of work to improve service responses

IGFF is broadly supportive of all endeavours to better support those impacted by institutional abuse. Noting the complex pathways and reviews underway at a National level, IGFF would recommend care be undertaken not to repeat this work or the work of the National Centre for Action. IGFF is disappointed that this recommendation fails to account for the chronic and severe funding shortages suffered by the support services sector at large.

Recommendation 9 - Legislative reform to ensure the enduring protection of personal information provided to boards of inquiry

IGFF strongly supports this recommendation, having previously cited this as a preventative factor in some Survivors' disengagement with the Inquiry process. This should be further extended to cover the truth-telling and accountability process in Recommendation 5.